DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 470 456 JC 020 740

AUTHOR	O'Sullivan, Mary F.
TITLE	What Belongs on an Instructional Website: A Discussion and Checklist.
PUB DATE	2001-05-00
NOTE	6p.; Paper contributed to the Annual Teaching in the Community Colleges Online Conference, "The Internet and Learning: What Have We Discovered and Where Are We Headed" (6th, Kapiolani Community College, May 1-3, 2001).
AVAILABLE FROM	For full text: http://leahi.kcc.hawaii.edu/org/tcon01/presenters.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Online Courses; Community Colleges; Computer Assisted Instruction; Computer Mediated Communication; *Distance Education; *Educational Technology; Two Year Colleges; *Virtual Classrooms; *Web Based Instruction; World Wide Web

ABSTRACT

This document provides a checklist for the development of effective instructional Web sites that promote student learning and enable instructors to enact the principles of good teaching. The information presented is valuable for instructors of online courses and faculty members who utilize instructional sites to supplement face-to-face classroom interaction. The essential components outlined in the document include: (1) introductions of class participants; (2) course orientation; (3) information on assignments and assessments; and (4) opportunities for communication. Elements of the introduction section include a biography of the instructor, contact information, and a list of students enrolled in the course. Class orientation materials include course policies, the syllabus, textbook information, course objectives, and a list of supplemental resources. The author asserts that an effective course orientation is essential for fostering the development of independent learners. In the discussion of assignments and assessment, the author highlights the importance of developing assignments that explicitly state the expectations, evaluation criteria, and whenever possible, offer examples of model assignments. With respect to fostering communication via instructional Web sites, the author suggests using electronic class discussion lists or bulletin boards to foster dialogue and reflection. (RC)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 470 456

What Belongs on an Instructional Website: A Discussion and Checklist

Mary F. O'Sullivan

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

[] This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

[] Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality

[] Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

M. O'Sullivan

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

JC 020 740

WHAT BELONGS ON AN INSTRUCTIONAL WEBSITE: A DISCUSSION AND CHECKLIST

Mary F. O'Sullivan
Ph.D, Communication Skills Department, Western Wisconsin Technical College, <maryo@centurytel.net>

Four years ago when I began teaching online, classes delivered over the Internet were not common. Now the numbers and types of courses available online grows daily. However, in the rush to put courses online, the websites supporting them are not always designed to make the best use of the technology available nor do they always reflect what is known about good teaching practices. As Chickering and Erhmann (1997) have pointed out, the same principles of good teaching that apply in a face-to-face classroom, also apply in an online environment. Consequently, instructional websites, no matter whether they are created with web authoring software or constructed with one of the commercial courseware packages such as BlackBoard, should have specific components to support students in their learning endeavor and enable instructors to follow the principles of good teaching.

This paper grew from a workshop for two-year college faculty at Western Wisconsin Technical College. As the coordinator of the Virtual Online Instruction Center (VOICe) at Western, I wanted to make available to faculty both a useful checklist of needed components for either a website that supported face-to-face instruction or for a totally online class. In addition, however, I wanted the checklist to lead to more resources for those who wanted to further explore the pedagogy behind the components on the checklist. Consequently, each component of the list itself links to instructional website examples and to relevant research, published online, supporting and explaining the use of the component. This hyperlinked checklist is available at: http://www.western.tec.wi.us/voice/class/vtutor/wbchklst.htm

The functions of an instructional website, particularly for online classes, need to support students interacting with each other, the instructor, and the course material. To this end, a website should have: information about the instructor and the college, course information to orient the student, all necessary course materials and all assignments, and multiple methods for communication. I will briefly address each of these; however, the heart of this presentation, with a more thorough discussion of each component of the checklist, is found at the hyperlinked checklist referenced above.

INTRODUCTIONS OF CLASS PARTICIPANTS

Students need to and want to know who their instructor is. Just as an instructor would provide an introduction on the opening day of class in a face-to-face classroom, so should the online instructor provide students with information about herself/himself. What is provided is, of course, up to the individual. It may be only professional information and a vita, or it may include more personal information about families and hobbies. Many instructors also include a picture of themselves. It is also important that the students feel part of a community learners. Again, providing pictures of those enrolled in the class may help students see their classmates as real people. Asking students to introduce themselves to the class at the beginning of the semester can serve the same function that ice-breakers do in a traditional classroom.

Finally, access to the instructor is even more important in an online environment than it is within a traditional instructional environment. Online students often cannot simply drop by an instructor's office during an office hour, so it is important that information for keeping in contact and for seeking help, are readily available to students.

ORIENTING THE STUDENT TO THE COURSE

Of course, a student needs information about the course as well. For an online student, access to everything they need to know about the course should be WITH the course. That means, it should all be readily available online. Early in the semester, students will form the habit of looking for the information they need on the class website IF it is indeed available immediately. If, on the other hand, students find that their questions are not answered on the class website from the beginning of the semester, they are apt to not refer to the website unless explicitly instructed to do so. Instructors who want students to be active, independent learners must be prepared to have an entire semester's learning activities ready before a semester starts.

Material that will orient the student to the site, the resources of the site, and to the way the course will be conducted are the first step toward helping students be independent learners. The content would include all the traditional pieces of information handed out in a face-to-face classroom such as course polices and

IC020740

syllabus. In addition, students might need information on receiving passwords to enter secure parts of the website, addresses for tools used in the course, textbook and required materials and so on.
To help orient students to a course, I suggest the following be part of a course website:

About You:

1. Name and title
2. Credentials and experience
3. Personal interests (OPTIONAL)
4. Your interest in the topic/course (OPTIONAL)
5. How you can be reached
    - Office phone number
    - Fax number
    - Email address
6. When you can be reached
    - Office hours
    - Phone-in hours
    - Online office hours in a synchronous chat

About your Course:

1. Course name, number, and meeting time (if meeting on-campus)
2. Course description
3. Relevance of the course
4. Course objectives
    - What should students learn or do in your course?
    - Are these objectives specific and measurable?
5. Description of course requirements
6. Other expectations?
7. Course outline
8. Course schedule
    - Meeting dates/times (if any)
    - Due dates for assignments or projects
    - Exam dates

About Your College:

1. Important college phone numbers or links to them.
2. Links to your department or division pages.
3. Links to your college website(s)

Course Materials and Resources:

1. Textbook title, author
2. Other required materials
3. Suggested supplementary materials

ASSIGNMENTS AND ASSESSMENT

The day of the lecture has passed, whether in a traditional classroom or online. Chickering and Gamson's (1987) seven principles and Bensusan's (1998) twelve pillars of learning were developed in reference to face-to-face classrooms, but they are equally applicable to online learning. In essence both espouse student as active learner and instructor as facilitator. Success for online students seems to rest even more firmly on these principles (see, for example, Graham et al., 2001). Assignments should, therefore, be constructed to take advantage of the learning potentials in an online classroom.

Although the online classroom is ideally suited to foster active learning, there are some negative factors that also must be taken into account. Perhaps the most significant factor is that students bring a wide variation in skills for reading and comprehending text online. For this reason, it is crucial that directions for assignments be clear, that requirements be explicitly stated, that grading criteria and any penalties for late assignments be itemized, and that, whenever possible, examples of acceptable assignments be provided.

Finally, assessment must be carefully designed. It can be difficult to administer traditional tests in an online class, but there are a multitude of effective techniques for assessment. Once again, good practice for assessment (see, for example, Suskie, 2000) often goes beyond paper and pencil tests to include multiple venues and measures.

To help orient students successfully complete assignments and coursework, I suggest the following be part of a course website:

Guidelines For:

1. Assignments
    - Directions (broken into steps)
    - Required format
    - Limits (minimum/maximum)
    - Examples
2. Exams
    - What to expect (length, type, etc.)
    - Mechanics (how and where administered etc.)
3. Course policies
    - Grading criteria
    - Grading scale
    - Late assignments
    - Plagiarism
4. Study suggestions

COMMUNICATION IS THE KEY

An online course is successful or fails based on the amount and clarity of communication between participants. For this reason, redundancy in communication methods and explanation of the way particular communication tools will be used in an online course, are crucial. In a traditional face to face class, students and instructors communicate in a number of ways: lectures, handouts, Socratic discussion during class time, face-to-face conversations in the instructor's office or in the halls of the college. Student needs and instructional needs remain the same when a class goes online, so it is useful to design methods for all those types of communication.

For one to one communication, the kind that would take place face-to-face in an instructor's office, email might be used. For conveying information to the entire class an email based discussion list is useful. This tool may also be employed to prompt students to help them pace their work. Students might also use the email based discussion list to ask questions about assignments. So email and email-based discussion lists can serve as venues for asynchronous office hours, for disseminating material that might occur in a lecture, and for questions of procedure and about content. To offer a space for reflective discussion of the course material, readings, and issues raised by those readings, a conference (sometimes referred to as a forum or a bulletin board) can be utilized. This tool becomes the site for class discussion. Finally there should, of course, be clear directions for using all of these tools.

Specifically, then, in addition to those elements necessary for a course website that have already been listed and discussed, there are some components specific to the online class website.

Additional Material For Online Courses:

1. Introduction to your website
2. Introduction to communication media used for course delivery (discussion list and/or conference)
3. Instructions for accessing other online materials (PowerPoint slides, rtf or pdf files, video)
4. Methods and requirements for class participation
5. Protocol for submitting assignments
6. Contingency plans for communication when there are technical problems

CONCLUSION

The website checklist is not meant to shackle an instructor, dictating every item that must appear on a course website, but rather it was created to help faculty experience the thinking and writing of others concerning online learning components, to serve as a catalyst for customizing an individual's course website, and to provide examples of the ways others have designed the components to fit their instructional needs. This brief discussion summarizes some key ideas, but certainly does not constitute a complete discussion. For that, visit the hyperlinked checklist at:

http://www.western.tec.wi.us/voice/class/vtutor/wbchklst.htm

The checklist will change and grow as the technology for online instruction develops and as research offers new insights into the pedagogy of online instruction. It will only be useful if it remains as dynamic as the webbed world it describes.

REFERENCES

Bensusan, G. (November 1998). Beyond teaching: Twelve pillars for managing learning. http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~hgb/beyond.html (9 March 2001).

Chickering, A. W. (August 28, 1997). Implementing the seven principles: Technology as lever. American Association of Higher Education. http://www.aahe.org/technology/erhmann.htm (28 Februrary 2001)

Chickering, A. and Gamson, Z. (1987). Seven principles of good practice in undergraduate education. AAHE Bulletin, 39, 3-7.

Graham, C., Cagiltay, K., Lim, B., Craner, J., and Duffy, T. (March/April 2001). Seven principles of effective teaching: A practical lens for evaluating online courses. The Technology Source. http://horizon.unc.edu/TS/default.asp?show=article&id=839 (12 March 2001).

Suskie, L. (Mary 2000). Fair assessment practices: Giving students equitable opportunities to demonstrate learning. AAHE Bulletin. http://www.aahe.org/bulletin/may2.htm (20 March 2001).

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

Reproduction Release

(Specific Document)

I. DOCUMENT IDENTIFICATION:

Title: **What Belongs on an Instructional Website: A Discussion and Checklist.**	
Author(s): **Mary F. O'Sullivan**	
Corporate Source: **Sixth Annual Teaching in the Community Colleges Online Conference**	Publication Date: **May 2001**

II. REPRODUCTION RELEASE:

In order to disseminate as widely as possible timely and significant materials of interest to the educational community, documents announced in the monthly abstract journal of the ERIC system, Resources in Education (RIE), are usually made available to users in microfiche, reproduced paper copy, and electronic media, and sold through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). Credit is given to the source of each document, and, if reproduction release is granted, one of the following notices is affixed to the document.

If permission is granted to reproduce and disseminate the identified document, please CHECK ONE of the following three options and sign in the indicated space following.

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 1 documents	The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2A documents	The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2B documents
PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY SAMPLE TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)	PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE, AND IN ELECTRONIC MEDIA FOR ERIC COLLECTION SUBSCRIBERS ONLY, HAS BEEN GRANTED BY SAMPLE TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)	PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY SAMPLE TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
Level 1	**Level 2A**	**Level 2B**

X	☐	☐
Check here for Level 1 release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche or other ERIC archival media (e.g. electronic) *and* paper copy.	Check here for Level 2A release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche and in electronic media for ERIC archival collection subscribers only	Check here for Level 2B release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche only

Documents will be processed as indicated provided reproduction quality permits.
If permission to reproduce is granted, but no box is checked, documents will be processed at Level 1.

I hereby grant to the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) nonexclusive permission to reproduce and disseminate this document as indicated above. Reproduction from the ERIC microfiche, or electronic media by persons other than ERIC employees and its system contractors requires permission from the copyright holder. Exception is made for non-profit reproduction by libraries and other service agencies to satisfy information needs of educators in response to discrete inquiries.

Signature:	Printed Name/Position/Title: **Mary F. O'Sullivan, PhD**	
Organization/Address: **Western Wisconsin Technical College 304 Sixth Street North La Crosse, WI 54602-0908**	Telephone: **608-785-9197**	Fax: **608-785-9407**
	E-mail Address: **osullivanm@wwtc.edu**	Date: **October 24, 2002**

III. DOCUMENT AVAILABILITY INFORMATION (FROM NON-ERIC SOURCE):

If permission to reproduce is not granted to ERIC, or, if you wish ERIC to cite the availability of the document from another source, please provide the following information regarding the availability of the document. (ERIC will not announce a document unless it is publicly available, and a dependable source can be specified. Contributors should also be aware that ERIC selection criteria are significantly more stringent for documents that cannot be made available through EDRS.)

Publisher/Distributor:
Address:
Price:

IV. REFERRAL OF ERIC TO COPYRIGHT/REPRODUCTION RIGHTS HOLDER:

If the right to grant this reproduction release is held by someone other than the addressee, please provide the appropriate name and address:

Name:
Address:

V. WHERE TO SEND THIS FORM:

Send this form to the following ERIC Clearinghouse:

However, if solicited by the ERIC Facility, or if making an unsolicited contribution to ERIC, return this form (and the document being contributed) to:

ERIC Processing and Reference Facility
4483-A Forbes Boulevard
Lanham, Maryland 20706
Telephone: 301-552-4200
Toll Free: 800-799-3742
e-mail: ericfac@inet.ed.gov
WWW: http://ericfacility.org

EFF-088 (Rev. 2/2001)